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Title: Ethanol fuels Fulton optimism

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The city of Fulton is looking toward better times as it prepares to join more than 100 cities around the country as an ethanol producer.

Bluegrass Bioenergy will begin construction of its \$96 million ethanol plant in Fulton's Industrial Park in mid-August. As early as Monday it will start dirt work on the 130 acres and begin adding offices to an existing building at the site located off the Purchase Parkway and Ky. 307. Meanwhile, residents in the area look forward to more jobs, additional businesses, more demand for corn and higher corn prices.

State and local officials spoke at a groundbreaking ceremony Saturday morning. They congratulated Fulton leaders for the efforts that attracted Bluegrass Bioenergy to the area and for the anticipated impact of the ethanol plant.

Gov. Ernie Fletcher said the plant itself will add about 50 jobs but the indirect impact will be broader. The plant will support the area's farmers while providing an environmentally friendly fuel alternative, Fletcher noted.

"This investment was a great investment for Kentucky," he said.

The ethanol plant well could spur related development — more businesses that eventually could add several hundred jobs to the local economy, Fletcher said.

Robbie Rudolph, secretary of the governor's executive cabinet and a Fulton native, said, after years of a lean job market that resulted from plant closings, Fulton County's future looks markedly brighter with the coming ethanol production.

"This is just a great day," he said. "It's a light at the end of the tunnel."

Bluegrass Bioenergy President Jim Allen said the facility will produce 55 million gallons of ethanol each year. It will use about 19 million bushels of corn to produce the fuel.

Farmers Sam Hancock of Fulton and Henry Sanger of Hickman said they look forward to the ethanol plant opening for the boost it will give to the demand for corn.

U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Hopkinsville, said that area prices could rise as much as 10 to 15 cents per bushel of corn because of the ethanol plant.

“That would definitely be good,” said Hancock, who grows corn, wheat and soybeans. He said the price for corn currently hovers at about \$2.30 per bushel.

Allen said his company was attracted to the site because of its proximity to a major Canadian National Railroad switching yard and an ideally large corn supply. Although the site is close to the Mississippi River and the company could use barges to transport ethanol, Allen said they will probably rely on rail.

It’s likely the plant will ship ethanol to blenders in states such as Tennessee, Michigan, Ohio and the New England states. An energy bill passed last year requires refiners to double the use of corn-based ethanol in gasoline to 7.5 billion gallons in 2012. With this new law, the facility likely will find a growing market for ethanol well beyond Kentucky’s borders.

Allen said he hopes to have the facility operating and producing ethanol by Oct. 1, 2007.

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